

Project Description

The Harvest and Harmony Garden to Table project was executed over the course of 8 months, starting with the development of the plan and concluding with the group potluck. The project went through 4 phases: development, recruitment, execution (workshop facilitation), and conclusion - which includes the potluck and final report. The purpose of the project was to empower trans and nonbinary youth aged 16-24 with the knowledge and skills to take care of their bodies and minds through self-sustainable practices of gardening and cooking.

The project manifested as a weekly workshop series culminating in a group potluck. For 12 weeks, participants spent 6 sessions learning and practicing gardening principles and another 6 sessions learning the fundamentals of cooking, all through the lens of attending to their wellbeing and mental health. Sessions were a mixture of in-person and virtual formats, with guest facilitators to augment the program with their unique perspective or expertise.

We had the most contact with Dr. Chiyah through the development phase of the project in order to clarify if the plan and execution met the criteria of the SOW. Dr. Chiyah was incredibly helpful, responsive, and collaborative when we had clarifying questions or potential roadblocks. We were able to collaborate on deliverables and nuances of the SOW that were developed with good intentions but limited in part by outside factors. For example, we needed to solve for the tax implications of requiring participants to show up in order to qualify for their stipend. This, in the eyes of the IRS, is considered an exchange of services and counts as taxable wages for amounts over \$600.

Thankfully after a few initial conversations to clear up the questions around the SOW, there was very little to figure out once the workshops started. I felt supported and like the goal with Chiyah was to deliver a great experience for the participants rather than simply completing deliverables.

During the recruitment phase, outreach was conducted to Los Angeles County LGBTQ organizations serving overlapping communities. Program information, flyers, and participant applications were distributed through personal networks to schools, cafes, arts and recording studios, therapy practices specializing in LGBTQ+ clients, and community centers. Caroline, the gardening co-facilitator, tabled at in-person community events, including the LA Queer Coalition resource event in February. A local canvasser was hired to post physical flyers across schools, cafes, studios, and community centers. Two remote recruiters were hired to correspond virtually with LGBTQ organizations and schools.

The workshops kicked off on March 14, 2026 and ran weekly until May 30, 2026, culminating in a potluck on June 6. Due to variable attendance and not having 25 participants from the start, we kept the application open for 9 weeks of the series and a handful of folks joined part of the way through the series. Of the 12 workshops, 6 were held in person and 6 were held virtually. In-person sessions included 4 cooking and 2 gardening workshops; virtual sessions included 2 cooking and 4 gardening workshops. Gardening workshops were facilitated by Caroline Foley. Cooking workshops were facilitated by Lou Reese, with two sessions co-facilitated by Max Rappaport, a local chef and food stylist, one session co-facilitated by Tannaz Sassooni, a local chef specializing in Iranian Jewish cuisine, and one session co-facilitated by Raven Juergensen, a therapist from Open Space Therapy, who led the group through a group art therapy exercise and talked about mental health.

For the potluck, we encouraged participants to attend regardless of if they had a contribution to share. Many participants were in transitional housing or housing that did not have kitchen access or allow cooking knives.

Project Results

Participants consistently named community as their primary motivation for joining the series, and it remained the most impactful element throughout. This is reflected in the survey data, where Sense of Belonging and Community Connection showed the strongest gains of any outcome area. In-person sessions drew higher attendance on average than virtual ones, and the moments of informal connection — not structured around learning a skill — often generated the most organic joy among participants. For a group navigating a particularly heavy cultural and political moment, the ability to connect across their differences appeared to lighten that weight in meaningful ways.

Skill-building also played a consistent role in participant experience. Trying new ingredients, gardening methods, cooking techniques, and cuisines sparked curiosity that extended beyond the workshops themselves, with participants reporting that learning something new in one area opened them up to exploring others. Gaining new skills built confidence, and that confidence surfaced as creative problem-solving in other parts of their lives. Participants also found value in simply being heard; sharing struggles without the expectation of having them solved was named as meaningful in itself.

Outcomes

Each of the 12 workshops used a matched pre/post survey measuring participant confidence and well-being across seven outcome areas on a 1 to 5 scale (1 = low confidence / strongly disagree, 5 = high confidence / strongly agree). A total of 53 surveys were collected across 18 unique participants. Average scores rose from 2.96 before to 4.18 after, a gain of +1.22 points, with positive change recorded in every outcome area across every session.

The strongest gains were in relational outcomes: Sense of Belonging (+1.49), Community Connection (+1.40), and Comfort Discussing Mental Health (+1.38). Healthy Habits and Self-Care (+1.38) and Resilience (+1.13) followed. Access to Mental Health Support (+1.02) and Mental Health Literacy (+0.75) showed the smallest gains, with Mental Health Literacy also carrying the highest pre-score, suggesting participants entered with existing knowledge in that area.

Among the 14 participants who attended more than one session, growth was generally greater for those who attended more sessions. Participant 9513, who attended 9 of 12 sessions, began with an average score of 1.49 and finished at 3.30, a gain of +1.81. Several participants who entered with already-high baseline scores also showed upward movement, indicating the series supported participants across a range of starting points.

Participants were asked at each session which topic would be most impactful in their life and why, and their responses clustered around three themes.

On connection and community, participants wrote: "Gardening is a great reason to get outside and get grounded on hard mental health days — excited to learn more and continue connecting with community" and "Relating to people in ways that aren't recovery-focused. Funny how that works."

On self-care and grounding: "Cooking is great for self-care and grounding" and "The relaxation of gardening, seeing growth in plants being slow and meaningful and comparing it to life" and "Sometimes letting things take their time and trusting they will work out — in cooking but in general as well."

On intentionality and curiosity: "Taking the time to be intentional with what I'm doing makes everything more fun," "Being more mindful and intentional with even the smallest things," and "There is always a way. Cooking eggs in a new way from a different culture makes me hopeful to apply that to other areas of life."

Lessons Learned

The majority of participants learned about the program through flyers at the LA LGBT Center and surrounding Hollywood area locations, and geography proved to be a significant factor throughout the series. Most participants came from Zone 4 (the Hollywood area), and a number of interested individuals did not join due to commute distance. This points to the value of centering programming within a community's existing geographic hub rather than expecting participants to travel across the city.

In-person sessions drew higher and more consistent attendance than virtual ones, with some participants only able to attend select in-person sessions due to distance. For future iterations, prioritizing in-person programming and locating it within the community it serves would likely improve both recruitment and retention.

Structurally, the series surfaced a tension between covering content and building community. For this age group and demographic, developing foundational skills and interpersonal connections proved more valuable than moving through a broad range of material. Revisiting and reinforcing core skills balanced with introducing new content each session allowed participants to build confidence over time. Similarly, less structured time that was dedicated to cultivating community, rather than focused instruction, produced some of the most meaningful moments of the series. Future programming would benefit from building that balance intentionally from the start.

Having supporting facilitators present was an asset, enabling more individualized attention and allowing the group to move through content at varying paces without leaving anyone behind.

A note specifically for the on-call mental health professional requirement from the SOW: There is a large overlap between the trans community, neurodivergence and/or trauma, and/or having limited access to resources so it was no surprise to encounter a few instances where participants' struggles became apparent. Yet even when a participant was struggling, no one took advantage of the on-call therapist. For the future, we suggest having an in-person mental health professional for in-person workshops. There were approximately 3 instances where someone was dealing with social anxiety which hindered their ability to participate to varying degrees of severity. Despite being reminded or encouraged to reach out to the on-call therapist, they declined to do so. The facilitators did their best to help individuals experiencing hardship, but on-site support from a trained therapist could have been beneficial.

Recommendations

Based on the experience of this series, several recommendations emerge for future program design, some of which may be applied together and others as alternatives depending on capacity and goals.

Singular content focus. Offering gardening or cooking as a standalone program, rather than both, would allow for greater depth and more opportunities to practice and reinforce skills. A number of prospective participants expressed interest in only one of the two topics, and a singular focus may also improve recruitment by offering a clearer program identity.

Limit or reconsider the plus-one model. While guests were consistently positive additions to the group, the logistical complexity of planning for plus-ones is significant, particularly in a cooking program. Dietary restrictions and allergies become exponentially harder to manage when the guest list changes week to week. Planning for up to double the number of participants also substantially increases material costs, food waste risk, and the kitchen space required. For in-person cooking sessions, the series required splitting into two groups to accommodate potential capacity, and finding kitchen space in Los Angeles that can support 50 or more people without an existing culinary program infrastructure is not realistic.

Shorter series. A number of participants dropped off mid-series due to changes in life circumstances, including job changes and housing instability. This age group is also statistically likely to be managing other long-term commitments such as college, and a shorter series may be easier to complete. Fewer sessions with a tighter arc could improve retention without sacrificing impact.

Location-based or partner model. Centering the program within a specific geographic community, or partnering with an existing organization that already has an established membership, would reduce the commute barrier that prevented some interested participants from joining. Working within a smaller geographic radius would also strengthen the sense of local community among participants, which was the most valued outcome of the series. While finding participants from all zones of Los Angeles as well intended, that made the in-person locations for some people very far away. Even the most centrally located workshops are very far for those living in the zones on the outskirts. Most of the participants were relying on public transportation so even a central location close to metro stops still took participants 1.5-2 hours to get to us when they were only a zone or two away.

We did not receive any applicants from Zone 1, 6 or 8. Also, 3 of out 27 applicants rescinded their application after finding out where the in person workshops were being held because of travel time and distance.

The Harmony & Harvest project demonstrated that community-centered, hands-on programming can be a meaningful vehicle for mental health support. Across 12 sessions, participants reported growth in every measured outcome area, with the strongest gains in Sense of Belonging, Community Connection, and Comfort Discussing Mental Health. Beyond the numbers, participants described feeling more grounded, more connected to others, and more open – in the kitchen, in the garden, and in their lives more broadly. For a group navigating a heavy external climate, the simple act of showing up together and sharing a meal or tending to something growing carried real weight.



HARVEST & HARMONY

Cooking & Garden Program for TRANS & NON-BINARY FOLKS of LA • ages 16 - 24

SATURDAYS
MARCH 14 TO JUNE 6

- ★ 13 FREE virtual & in-person workshops
 - ★ Garden-to-table cooking basics
 - ★ Gardening & cooking as self-care
 - ★ Supplies & stipend provided
- ★ Workshop attendance for you and one family or chosen-family member
- ★and so much more!

SCAN THE QR CODE



FOR MORE INFO & TO APPLY

  LOS ANGELES COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF
MENTAL HEALTH
hope. recovery. wellbeing. 

LACDMH 24/7 HELP LINE (800-854-7771)

Appendix B: Promotional Material - Instagram Post



HARVEST & HARMONY

Cooking & Garden Program

TRANS & NON-BINARY FOLKS
of LA • ages 16-24



SATURDAYS

MARCH JUNE

14 TO 6

13 FREE

Virtual & In-Person Workshops

**for you and one family or
chosen-family member**

COME LEARN...

- ★ Gardening & Cooking Basics
- ★ Garden-to-Table Cooking
- ★ Healthy Cooking on a Budget
- ★ Meal Planning
- ★ Gardening & Cooking as Self-Care
- ★ Confidence in Life and the Kitchen

....and so much more!



Supplies and stipend provided!

FOR MORE INFO & TO APPLY

**Click the link
in my bio!**

Appendix C: Project Results aggregation

Harmony & Harvest

A 12-Week Workshop Series in Cooking, Gardening & Mental Wellness

12 53 18 +1.22

WORKSHOPS SURVEY RESPONSES UNIQUE PARTICIPANTS AVG SCORE GAIN

Overview

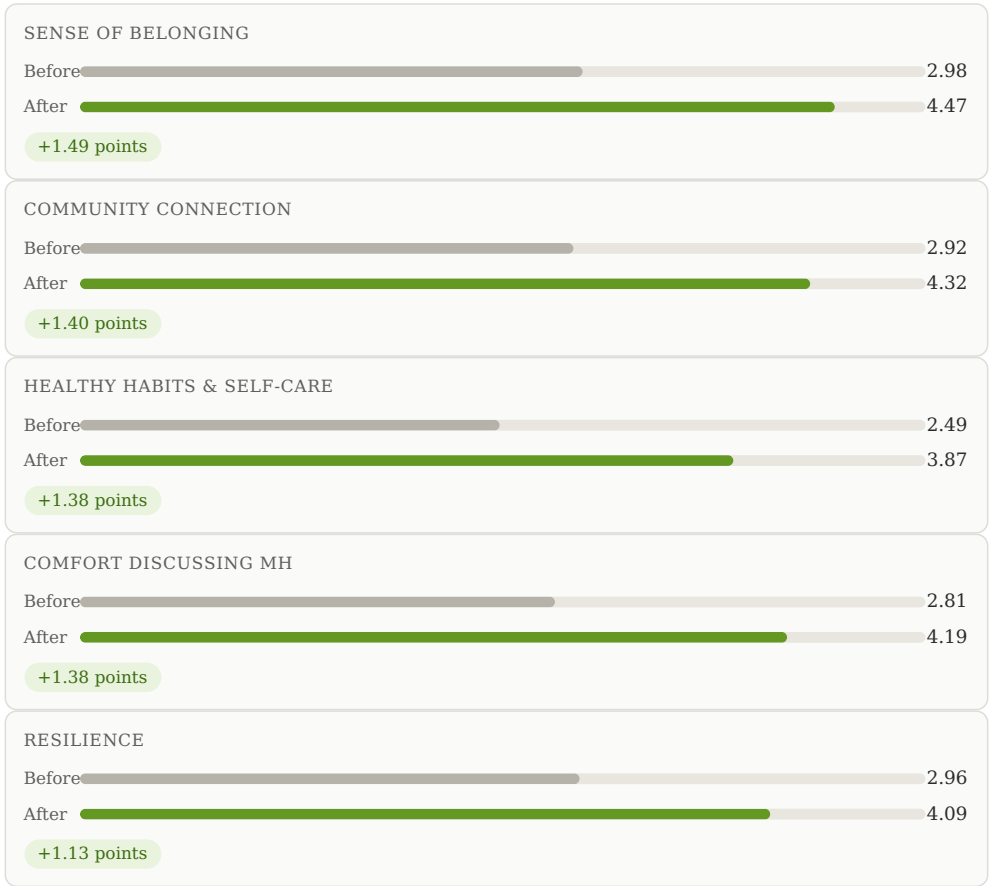
Across all 12 workshops (March through May 2026), participants reported gains in every measured outcome area. Average scores rose from 2.96 to 4.18 on a 5-point scale, a gain of +1.22 points.

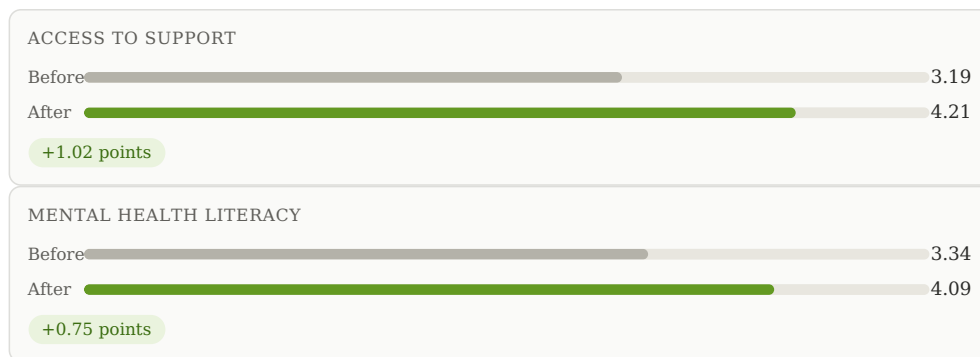
The strongest gains were in relational outcomes: Sense of Belonging (+1.49), Community Connection (+1.40), and Comfort Discussing Mental Health (+1.38). Participants who returned for multiple sessions tended to show greater overall growth.

Outcome Domains — Before & After

Average scores on a 1 to 5 scale (1 = low confidence / strongly disagree, 5 = high confidence / strongly agree). All 53 responses included.

● Before ● After





Session-by-Session Overview

Average scores per workshop. Workshops #7 and #10 had one respondent each — read with caution.

Workshop	Date	n	Avg Before	Avg After	Gain
#1	Mar 14	7	2.86	4.14	+1.29
#2	Mar 21	9	3.19	4.51	+1.32
#3	Mar 28	4	2.50	4.54	+2.04
#4	Apr 4	4	2.75	4.00	+1.25
#5	Apr 11	4	2.46	4.11	+1.64
#6	Apr 18	8	2.88	4.23	+1.36
#7	Apr 25	1*	1.14	3.43	+2.29
#8	May 2	4	3.46	4.11	+0.64
#9	May 9	5	3.37	4.23	+0.86
#10	May 16	1*	3.29	3.29	0.00
#11	May 23	3	2.86	3.76	+0.90
#12	May 30	3	3.48	3.95	+0.48

* Single respondent. Interpret with caution.

Participant Journeys

Average before and after scores across all sessions attended, sorted by growth. Filled dots indicate workshops attended.

Participant	Sessions	Workshops Attended	Avg Before	Avg After	Growth
ID 6114	5	●●●●●○○○○○○	1.00	5.00	+4.00
ID 5834	2	●●○○○○○○○○	2.29	4.64	+2.36
ID 9513	9	●●●●●●●●●○○	1.49	3.30	+1.81
ID 1480	5	●●●●●○○○○○	2.66	4.34	+1.69
ID 7874	2	●●○○○○○○○○	3.36	4.64	+1.29
ID 0188	4	●●●●○○○○●●	3.14	3.93	+0.79
ID 7790	4	●●●●○○○○●●	4.18	4.89	+0.71
ID 0063	5	●○○○○○○●●●●	4.29	4.69	+0.40
ID 0379	4	○○○○○○●●●●	3.39	3.46	+0.07

Participant Voices

Selected responses to: "Which topic will be most impactful in your life, and why?"

CONNECTION & COMMUNITY

"Gardening is a great reason to get outside and get grounded on hard mental health days. Excited to learn more and continue connecting with community!"

Workshop #1

"Relating to people in ways that aren't recovery-focused. Funny how that works."

Workshop #9

"The dish being made as tradition for a lost loved one really meant a lot to me and helped me connect with my life."

Workshop #6

"There is always a way. Cooking eggs in a new way from a different culture makes me hopeful to apply that to other areas of life."

Workshop #6

SELF-CARE & GROUNDING

"Cooking is great for self-care and grounding. I love the techniques we learned today."

Workshop #2

"The relaxation of gardening, seeing growth in plants being slow and meaningful and comparing it to life."

Workshop #3

"Sometimes letting things take their time and trusting they will work out, in cooking but in general as well."

Workshop #8

"I feel much lighter but also grounded."

Workshop #2

INTENTIONALITY

"Taking the time to be intentional with what I'm doing makes everything more fun."

Workshop #2

"Being more mindful and intentional with even the smallest things."

Workshop #6

"To do the best I can about shopping ethically but to not be too hard on myself."

Workshop #4

"Getting to know how I can grow my own food will help me with food insecurity."

Workshop #12

Harmony & Harvest · March through May 2026 · Pre/Post Survey Analysis · n=53 responses, 18 unique participants · Facilitated by Lou Reese